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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSJ #0999/01 1452046
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 252046Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8112
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 3620

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000999

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CEN AND INL/LP

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: COSTA RICAN POLICE PROFESSIONALIZATION PROGRAM

REF: PANAMA 492

11. SUMMARY: Taking advantage of technical assistance from NAS Panama, Post has launched a multi-year program to professionalize Costa Rica's national police force. With crime rates rising rapidly and over 700,000 Americans visiting each year, the program is a key part of our Mission Strategic Plan and responds to a direct request for assistance from the Arias Administration. The goal of the program is ultimately to transform Costa Rica's Fuerza Publica from a traditional, reactive police force into a proactive, community-oriented police force that is truly preventative. Implementation will require a complete change of philosophy within the Fuerza Publica and making effective use of information tools like COMPSTAT. Costa Rica will also have to dedicate substantial financial and human resources to the project. With top-level buy-in and a 35% increase in the Ministry of Public Security's 2007 budget, plus progress on campaign promises to hire 4,000 new police officers over the Arias administration's four years in power, the program is off to a good start. END SUMMARY.

The Program

12. The first part of the program targets top police managers through a series of seminars on executive leadership (SEMAGEL). The first SEMAGEL was held in San Jose on April 25-26 at the Ministry of Public Security. The top official for each police district (all 10 Comissarios) and nearly 20 key operational and administrative staff attended the seminar. Since the program entails radical change, debate was lively from the outset with obviously different levels of buy-in among the Comissarios. Over the course of the seminar, NAS Panama's Police Advisor Don Gosselin and the head of Panama's Metropolitan Police Unit Rigoberto Feuillebois addressed questions, challenges, and reservations based on their direct personal experience. While it is too soon to declare all the seminar participants completely on board, they do have a fuller understanding of what the changes mean and how they will be implemented. The philosophies behind community policing were discussed at length. Participants were taught a self-evaluation tool (called EARE in Spanish) in which success is measured in terms of problems solved at the community level and with community participation.

13. Political leadership at the Ministry of Public Security is fully committed to the program. At the end of the seminar, Vice Minister Gutierrez impressed the participants with his knowledge of the program and made clear to all that a full transition to community policing is a key part of the Ministry's overall policy. The Vice Minister acknowledged that implementation will require a complete revision of philosophy and doctrine within the Fuerza Publica. Gutierrez urged the Comissarios to faithfully implement the transition,

and warned that he will be following their progress closely.

COMPSTAT

14. The second part of the program is to improve management tools and technology. Gosselin and Feuillebois introduced COMPSTAT as a management tool to assist senior managers in holding subordinates accountable for results. COMPSTAT is a data-analysis tool that generates digital maps which display exactly where and when crimes occur so that trends can be identified and police resources applied effectively. The group participated in a mock COMPSTAT meeting to understand how the process works from the supervisory and mid-level management perspective. Participants saw clearly how COMPSTAT can help them respond proactively to prevent crimes rather than merely reacting afterward. They also saw how the system will quickly provide feedback to them and to their superiors if they fail to use the information effectively. COMPSTAT, or a system like it would be a highly effective tool in holding mid-level police managers accountable to their communities.

Next Steps

15. The next phase of SEMAGEL is practical application and will begin June 18. The first SEMAGEL seminar ended with a homework assignment. Participants returned to their districts charged with working with their communities to identify an existing security problem that is solvable within current resources. Officials are expected to work with community leaders to resolve the problem while applying the EARE self-evaluation tool. Gosselin and Feuillebios will return to review results and to hold another mock COMPSTAT meeting based on the results.

16. The final phase will require training for up to 150 mid-level managers in order to create a "command structure" capable of directing and focusing the efforts of the 4,000 new police officers Arias has promised. Using a "train the trainer" model, these mid-level officers will be trained primarily in Costa Rica by officials we will send to various instructor development courses and police academies in the U.S. Post began this process by sending four officials identified by the Ministry as "agents of change" to participate in a separate series of leadership seminars sponsored by NAS Panama and developed in conjunction with the Southern Police Institute at Louisville University (Reftel). This five-week course will build on SEMAGEL and provide in-depth training for the implementation of community policing. Also, we will send officials to train at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in conjunction with training financed by NAS Panama. Finally, we are exploring opportunities to send instructors to train at the New Mexico State Police Academy as part of the new Costa Rica State Partnership Program with the New Mexico National Guard.

COMMENT

17. The program is ambitious, urgently needed, and off to a good start. Adequate resource levels to train the mid-level managers and to provide some, but not all, of the equipment necessary to get a COMPSTAT-like system operating will determine our success. The GOCR is willing and able to meet us part way. For our part, we have requested \$200,000 in INCLE funds for 2008 and an additional \$100,000 for 2009 to support the program and see it through to completion. For Costa Rica to persuade the region that military forces are no longer needed to maintain domestic security, its police forces must be better trained, better led, more professional and more effective. For a few hundred thousand dollars, we can give them a significant push in the right direction.

WEITZENKORN